

The Bridge

PCAs: a bridge to community living

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANT QUALITY HOME CARE WORKFORCE COUNCIL

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Online PCA Referral Directory Has Arrived

by Michelle Byrd



“Consumers of the PCA program have waited a long time for an easier way to find new helpers when we experience turnover.”

—Liz Casey of Roslindale, a PCA employer and member of the PCA Workforce Council

The long wait Liz Casey referred to is now over. The Council’s new PCA referral directory is now operating, and access is free to all people with disabilities who qualify for the MassHealth PCA program. In September, events promoting the launch of the directory were held in Boston and Springfield. At the Boston event, held at the State House, Assistant Health & Human Services Secretary Jean McGuire, Chair of the Council, noted the launch as a milestone in the Council’s young history. Also speaking at the event were Paul Spooner, Council Vice-Chair; Senator Steven Tolman; Rep. Barbara L’Italien; and Rebecca Gutman from 1199 SEIU, which represents PCAs.

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(l to r) Sen. Steven Tolman congratulates the Council for developing the PCA referral directory. Rep. Barbara L’Italien speaks at the PCA directory launch event.

The Council contracted with Rewarding Work Resources, Inc., to develop and operate the directory. This directory will put you, as the employer, in direct contact with PCAs looking for work. Consumers can access the online directory at www.mass.gov/findpca.

How does the directory work?

The directory is a searchable database where consumers can search for a PCA by reviewing the responses that PCAs have given to a series of employment questions. Consumers can search the Web site by zip code for qualified PCAs in their area and screen for criteria including

- time of day that the worker is available to work;
- whether the PCA has access to a car and/or has a valid driver’s license; and
- the kind of work experience and/or special skills and training that the PCA has acquired.

By selecting several search criteria that match their needs, consumers can identify the best candidates to interview.

Para una versión en español, por favor llame a su Agencia de atención personal o al 617-210-5715.

How do I access the directory?

Consumers can access the directory from any computer by visiting www.mass.gov/findpca. To begin, click on “Establish an Account” and enter your MassHealth number (the process is secure and for verification purposes only). After you have established your account, you can search the database for PCA applicants. You can return to the directory as many times as you wish and can update your information at any time. Please see the easy-to-read “Tips for Consumer/Employers Using the Massachusetts PCA Directory” on this page for more details.

What if I need assistance or I don't have access to a computer?

The Web site is completely accessible for people who use any type of assistive technology. Consumers needing help should contact their PCM agency and ask for assistance with their information. Consumers can also get answers to their questions by dialing 1-866-212-9675.

How often is information on the database updated?

New PCAs looking for work are registering online daily. Your search of the database will always list, at the top of the page, the most recent applicants. Rewarding Work Resources and the Council will continue recruitment and outreach activities, promoting the Web site to current and new PCA workers.

How can PCAs register for work on the directory?

PCAs can register free by completing an online application at www.mass.gov/findpca or by calling the toll-free number at 1-866-211-WORK (9675) 24 hours a day.

Will the directory screen PCAs for employment?

No, the directory will not screen online applicants. It will be the responsibility of the consumer/employer to check the references of all potential employees.

The Council hopes all PCA consumers will use this valuable resource. Please feel free to contact the Council with comments regarding the directory. You can reach us by e-mail at pcacouncil@state.ma.us or by mail at the address on the back of this edition of The Bridge.

TIPS FOR CONSUMER/EMPLOYERS USING THE MASSACHUSETTS PCA DIRECTORY

- 1) Go to www.mass.gov/findpca. Click on HOW IT WORKS.
- 2) Click on ESTABLISH AN ACCOUNT and complete all required fields marked with an asterisk (*).
 - Remember to check TERMS AND CONDITIONS.
 - Enter your MassHealth number (process is secure and for verification purposes only).
 - Your e-mail address is your username.
 - You will receive a password by e-mail. You will be asked to change it the first time you log in.
 - Later, you may log in from any page on the site by entering your e-mail address, password, and MassHealth number.
 - You may change your information at any time.
- 3) Click on CONTINUE and go to APPLICANT SEARCH page.
 - Enter your zip code.
 - From the DISTANCE FROM ZIP CODE pull-down menu, click on 10 miles, 20 miles, or whatever distance you wish.

So You Want to Be a PCA

One Consumer's Perspective



Liz Casey has been a consumer member of the PCA Workforce Council since it began operation in 2006. In May 2009, Liz participated in a Council workshop given at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's Annual

Consumer Conference. Reprinted below is part of Liz's presentation. To get more information on Liz Casey, go to www.mass.gov/pca, click on "About the Council," and then click on "Council Members."

So you want to be a PCA. If you work as a PCA, a MassHealth consumer, like me, would be your employer, so let me tell you a bit about my life and your role in it. I have been employing personal care attendants (or PCAs) since 1990, almost 20 years now. I would guess that over those years I've employed almost 200 people. With their help, I lead a tremendously satisfying life. Because of them, I have been able to stay in my own home in Roslindale, where I am surrounded by friends and neighbors I've known for years. Because of these PCAs, I have been able to manage my life so that I could raise my daughter, which has been one of my greatest joys.

I work with the PCA Workforce Council, as well as the MS Society and the Boston Center for Independent Living, on issues that impact not only the disability community, but also the population in general, particularly when it comes to looking at the future of care in the home.

My life is busy, productive, interesting, and secure, at least on most days. But there have been days when a PCA is sick or has a family emergency, and that has been when my life goes into a bit of a tailspin. If there's no PCA, I am not getting out of bed. I won't get my leg bag changed. I will not be able to eat. I will not make it to work commitments. I will not meet other deadlines. Then, when I finally do find somebody to get me up, we will face twice as much work needing to be done. It's not a tragedy, but it sure is a hassle.

Then, there are the truly hard times that I have watched my PCAs endure, when someone would have to choose between taking care of a sick child versus working so she could pay her bills and buy food; or when a person would leave me to find another job that had health benefits or paid time off. It was very frustrating and very sad for me. I try to have about six-

- 4) Click GET RESULTS. You will see a list of candidates who live near you. The most recent names will be at the top of the list.
- 5) Click ADVANCED SEARCH to narrow your choices.
 - Click fields on the left to find the two or three characteristics most important to you (for example, "Does applicant have a valid driver's license?").
 - Click on GET RESULTS at the bottom of the page.
 - Sort Results: Check up to three columns, such as City, Experience, and Certification.

- 6) Click on UPDATE COLUMN OPTIONS for an overview of your choices. You may change fields and repeat.
- 7) Click on VIEW to see candidate's complete application.

Help is available by calling toll free 1-866-212-WORK (9675) or e-mailing eparker@rewardingwork.org.



to-eight people working for me at once, so the shifts are shared among many, making it easier for people to cover each other for when emergencies come up. The time periods when I must seek out, hire, and train new PCAs sidetrack my regular schedule and these time periods happen more often than I would like.

I think of others like me who are disabled with chronic conditions like the multiple sclerosis that I have lived with for 28 years. Many sit in their homes while their spouses go to work, waiting for their return so they can have something to eat or get help using the bathroom. Whether my PCAs are helping me get up and dressed and fed in record time so I can make a meeting, or helping me manage household tasks like mail, laundry, and dishes, I consider them superwomen.

So what is it like to be a PCA? It is as varied as the people you work for. When people start the job, they are understandably nervous. Even people who have experience are a bit uncomfortable because I am literally “in their hands.” Whether my PCA is lifting me in the Hoyer lift or rolling me on the bed to get me dressed, we are just at the beginning of building a trust with one another.

At the Start

As we begin our first days together, I will say to a PCA, “expect to feel stupid for a while, it is inevitable.” There are so many tasks, from brushing my teeth, to stretching my legs, to changing my leg bag, to making sense of this crazy hair of mine, it can be a little exhausting to integrate everything at first. But after we get in the swing of things, we often enjoy each other’s company, making jokes, sharing morning yawns, and talking about common interests while we work.

Without the help of my PCAs, my life falls apart very quickly; they are my lifeline. Think of all the things

you do in a day. Now imagine asking somebody to do them all for you, and do them your way! I tease my helpers and call them multi-multi-multitaskers. I am so grateful to my PCAs, because they are the ones who enable me to live the full life I lead.

They get me up in the morning, get me dressed, fix my breakfast, and feed it to me. After assisting me with my personal care needs, they help me with the house, dishes, laundry, mail, and picking up. You know the drill that we all do around our houses day to day. Imagine asking somebody to help you do every one of those little things. It can be a little overwhelming, but before I scare you away from this type of work, let me tell you a little bit about the positives.

For any of you who have cared for someone who is dependent on you, you know the feeling of deep satisfaction when you make an impact on his or her life. Whether it is a child, or an elderly grandparent, or a person who has dependency needs due to a disability, when you care for someone who needs your help, you usually find a better part of yourself, and that is real wealth.

Over the years, I have become personal friends with many of the PCAs who have worked for me. I stay in touch with former helpers who are all over the country and beyond. At times my roster of PCAs has looked like the United Nations, including persons from Ireland to India, South Africa to Romania. I have been to seven weddings of my PCAs. As a bonus, photos of beautiful babies arrive on a regular basis.

Now is a really good time to become a PCA. You have many people fighting for your rights as workers: consumers, the union, and members of government. So please take this opportunity to consider becoming a PCA, a chance to do gratifying and meaningful work.

Council Survey Shows Strong Support for PCA Program



Council member Denise Harvey asks a question during a presentation on the results of the consumer survey. Seated to her right is Councilor Joe Tringali. To her left are (l to r), Councilors Joe Bellil and Paul Spooner

As reported in the last edition of *The Bridge*, the PCA Workforce Council commissioned a survey of consumers of the MassHealth PCA program. The Council contracted with JSI Research & Training Institute, an internationally known public health research and consulting firm, to plan, conduct, and analyze the survey. Staff from JSI conducted a telephone survey of approximately 500 consumers or their surrogates, interviewed more than two dozen people knowledgeable about the program, and hosted a series of focus groups that provided more in-depth information. The results of the survey were presented to the Council at the April 2009 meeting.

The survey evaluated the following areas.

- Consumer needs
- Paid and unpaid assistance
- PCA recruitment and retention
- Administrative issues
- Consumer satisfaction
- Consumer recommendations for improving the program

Survey data was collected from 381 consumers and 121 surrogates. Some of the survey results were surprising. For instance, 61% of respondents reported no turnover of PCAs in the past 12 months, and 57% said they were able to find and hire a PCA within one week or less. Consumer satisfaction with the administrative aspects of the program was at 86%, while satisfaction with the services provided by their primary PCA stood at 96%.

Higher wages and better benefits for PCAs were the most frequent recommendation (29%) for improving the program. The second-most-frequently cited recommendation was to expand the scope of services covered under the program (16%). From the focus groups, interviews, and surveys, consumers consider the most important benefits of the PCA program to be the following.

- Increased quality of life
- Relationships with PCAs
- Consumer-directed nature of the program
- Ability to live independently

A PowerPoint presentation of the survey results is available at www.mass.gov/pca.

Worker's Compensation

Has your PCA missed work because he or she was injured while working for you? Have you told your PCA that you are covered by worker's compensation insurance? A recent survey showed that more than 30% of PCAs were unaware that they could apply for worker's comp if they missed work due to injury. Tell your PCA today. Details are available from your fiscal intermediary.

Labor Management Committee Gets to Work

The first part of Article 8 of the labor agreement between the Council (representing MassHealth consumers) and 1199SEIU (representing MassHealth PCAs) states:

In recognition of our mutual commitment to the success of the Council and the continued growth and stability of the PCA program, the Union and the Council shall establish a Labor Management Committee (LMC) to discuss topics of mutual interest.

Labor management committees are a traditional feature of unionized operations, with representatives from both sides sitting down to resolve individual, procedural, and other practical problems that can arise in administering any labor agreement.

The unique nature of the consumer/PCA employment relationship, however, has meant that labor relations, like many other aspects of the PCA program, will have a number of distinctive aspects. The LMC began meeting in early 2009. Representing the Council are members Joe Bellil, Liz Casey, and Paul Spooner. Jack Boesen, Council Director, is also a member of the LMC. Representing the union are PCAs Vicente de la Rosa, Brenda L. Lopez, Louis S. Wagner, and Lizete Rosa. Rebecca Gutman, Home Care Director for 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, also serves on the LMC.

Liz Casey said, “I was eager to join this committee, as it provides a real opportunity to foster the cooperation that should be the cornerstone of the Council’s relationship with 1199SEIU.” At the initial meeting of the LMC, the members agreed that decisions would be made by consensus rather than through voting. Liz Casey and Rebecca Gutman were elected co-chairs of the LMC.

The first issue taken on by the LMC was the number of late payments of wages being made to PCAs. Although some late payments are caused by the late or incorrect filing of time sheets and related issues, both sides felt that the payment system itself should

be reviewed. With assistance from Lois Aldrich, Director of the MassHealth PCA program, the LMC held a meeting attended by MassHealth staff, staff from the PCM agencies responsible for evaluating and training consumers, and staff from the fiscal intermediaries (FIs). The two-hour meeting included brainstorming, asking questions, and learning on the part of all participants. As a result, a protocol was developed for how PCAs should proceed if their check does not arrive on schedule (see list below).

The union and the workforce council have also taken up in the labor management committee the issue of paid time off and have committed to using the forum to discuss additional training opportunities for PCAs. In the words of Rebecca Gutman, “The labor management committee is a great opportunity for PCAs and PCA employers to come together to discuss issues of mutual concern. Most often, PCAs’ and employers’ interests are very similar, and when there are differences, the labor management committee provides a good process for exploring creative solutions.”

Procedure for PCAs to follow when they are missing a paycheck or receive an inaccurate paycheck

- 1) The PCA must first directly address the issue with his or her employer upon not receiving a paycheck, or receiving a paycheck the PCA believes is inaccurate.
- 2) The employer should then contact the FI or PCM directly to resolve the issue.
- 3) If the employer is unable or refuses to contact the FI or PCM directly, the PCA may contact the FI or PCM directly about the payroll issue.
- 4) If the payroll issue is due to the consumer’s lack of sufficient hours, the PCA should request that the employer contact the PCM agency. If the employer is unable or refuses to contact the PCM directly, the PCA may contact the PCM about

the issue. The PCM agency cannot share personal information with the PCA, but will investigate further to determine what action, if any, can be taken to resolve the matter.

- 5) Employers must abide by the laws and regulations of the Department of Labor, and must hire PCAs to work only the number of hours authorized by MassHealth. Failure to do so may result in PCAs filing a nonpayment-of-wage complaint against the employer with the Attorney General's Fair Wage and Labor Division.

First Aid Training



The PCA Workforce Council has added first aid courses to the training opportunities offered to MassHealth PCAs.

These courses will include the following.

- Assessment of emergency situations and injury treatment
- Basic Life Support: Review of CPR, Heimlich maneuver, and automated external defibrillators (AEDs)
- Allergies, anaphylaxis: use of Epi-pen
- Practicing self-care: preventing injury and disease transmission
- Planning for emergencies

The Council recommends that participants complete a CPR certification course before enrolling in the First Aid course.

All working PCAs are welcome to attend at no cost. Check our Web site (www.mass.gov/pca) for the next available CPR and First Aid course offerings.

Helping Your PCA

Tips for Consumer/Employers

Want to make sure your PCA gets his or her check as soon as possible? Here are a few things you can do.

1. Ask your PCA to complete the direct-deposit form provided by the fiscal intermediary.
2. Be sure to complete all the paperwork required by the fiscal intermediary when hiring a new PCA. This paperwork must be completed and sent to the fiscal intermediary before the PCA can be paid.
3. Be sure to send completed and signed timesheets for each PCA to the fiscal intermediary immediately at the end of each pay period. As the PCA's employer, you are required by law to pay your PCAs within six days of the end of each pay period.



New Councilor Appointed



The PCA Quality Home Care Workforce Council members and staff are pleased to welcome attorney Denise Harvey as a new member of the Council. Ms. Harvey was recommended by the Massachusetts Home Care Association and appointed

by Attorney General Martha Coakley in February 2009. Ms. Harvey has a son receiving PCA services on whose behalf she acts as a surrogate.

Denise Harvey has been practicing law since 1988. She received her B.A. from Regis College and her law degree from Suffolk University Law School. She has spent her legal career litigating civil and probate matters, particularly those relating to employment and civil rights, fiduciary disputes, and guardianship matters involving elders and disabled individuals.

Ms. Harvey also worked pro bono for more than 10 years preparing estate and guardianship plans for clients of both the AIDS Action Committee and the Home Hospice of Whidden Memorial Hospital. She is an active volunteer with Friends of Beverly School for the Deaf and was a founder and director of the North East Center for Conductive Education, an organization providing innovative therapy for children with cerebral palsy.

Ms. Harvey is a long-time advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. As a member of both the PCA Workforce Council and the North Shore Aging and Disability Resource Consortium, Ms. Harvey will continue supporting the effort to keep elder and disabled persons at home, rather than in nursing facilities, through the use of PCAs and other supports.

Contribute to the Bridge

The Bridge is a newsletter for MassHealth members who use PCA services. We are very interested in your letters, articles, and thoughts about the PCA program and improving the PCA workforce. Please send your ideas to pcacouncil@state.ma.us. We can't promise to print everything we receive, but all submissions will receive our serious attention. For consumers without e-mail, please call 617-210-5715 or forward your ideas to the address on the back of this edition of The Bridge.

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